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# Messages, tears for girl slain at school

## She 'brought sun's daylight,' poem says

By Randi Goldberg
Associated Press

Associated Press photograph

**Many mourners left flowers and notes at the Flint, Mich., funeral home where visitation was held Friday for Kayla Rolland.**

FLINT, Mich. – In a child's scrawl, the spelling not quite right, a poem propped on an easel near 6-year-old Kayla Rolland's gold-trimmed white casket Friday remembered the slain first-grader:

*"A smile so bright*
*"Eyes so light*
*"A pertty girl like you brought the sun's daylight."*

Three days after Kayla was shot to death in her elementary school by a 6-year-old classmate, hundreds of tearful mourners bearing flowers, cards and stuffed animals paid their respects during a daylong visitation Friday.

At a memorial service Friday night, some 1,000 mourners packed Brown Funeral Home to grieve. Many hadn't known Kayla, and many wept.

Kayla's older sister, Elizabeth, joined other relatives in taking turns reading a poem as they cried.

"How could they do that to Kayla?" the Rev. Gene Warren asked the mothers and fathers, some with their children and babies. "I don't have the answers. But I know she's with Jesus."

Among the mourners was Rob Parcels, who wept and said: "I don't know what to think anymore. What are we going to do now, have 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds with guns?"

Earlier during the visitation, Scott Messinger clutched a pink ribbon while holding his 2-year-old son tightly and handing out cards with Kayla's picture. He said he knows Kayla's family.

His eyes welling, Messinger bent down, kissed his son and told him softly, "I love you."

Kayla, in a red dress, lay in an open casket, a small doll of the TV character Barney beneath it. In her hands was a small card with a poem titled "I'm free."

A large poster board filled with signatures and messages from students at Kayla's school stood near the casket. "I'm sorry this happened," said many messages.

Mourners brought so many flowers by midday that some had to be put in another room.

Outside, someone left a small plastic pot with yellow flowers next to a row of shrubs. A handwritten index card taped to the pot carried a plea: "Please pray for our children!"

Kayla's uncle, Tim Rolland, said the family was grateful for all the support. His wife, Connie Rolland, was hopeful something good might come of Kayla's death.

"There needs to be more help for those adults and children who need it," she said.

Funeral director Donald Lada passed out pink ribbons and said over 7,000 had been pinned to lapels and tied to radio antennas.

James Ray, superintendent of schools in Flint, said he came on behalf of the entire school community. The district planned to donate books in Kayla's memory to Buell Elementary School, which is in another district, in neighboring Mount Morris Township.

Melissa Polacek, 20, came with 6-year-old cousin Kyle Cornelison. She said she took him so he would understand what happened.

"He said it was sad, and we talked about it a lot. I think he understands better now," she said.

The boy has told police that it was an accident and that he meant only to scare Kayla. The two are believed to have scuffled on the playground the day before, with one slapping the other.

No charges are expected against the boy. The prosecutor and many in the community have urged compassion for a child they say was hurt by a chaotic upbringing.

The boy's father is in jail, and his mother was evicted a few weeks ago. The boy was staying with an uncle and another man when he found the loaded gun.

"It's really a sad story," said 76-year-old Clarence Pompey, who lives two houses down from where Kayla lived. "He's nothing but a baby. I don't think it would solve anything to lock him up. He wasn't receiving any discipline."

Not everyone sees it that way in the community of 25,000 near Flint, a city that suffered mightily with the downturn of the auto industry in the 1980s.

Dropping off a teddy bear at a makeshift memorial for Kayla in front of the school, Steve Crouch said "someone should pay" for the youngster's death.

"I don't think the community should embrace a little boy who would do something like this, even if it's not on purpose," said Crouch, who was once a Buell student and is now the father of 3-year-old twin boys. "The community should embrace the parents of little Kayla."

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# A globe-circling dream deflates in Asian field

By William Claiborne
Washington Post

CHICAGO – Ten days after lifting off at a rock quarry near Rockford, Ill., adventurer Kevin Uliassi abandoned his attempt to become the first solo balloonist to make it around the world. On Friday, he made a hard landing in the Asian nation of Myanmar, formerly Burma.

Uliassi sustained some minor injuries when his 6-foot-long capsule landed, but Todd Little, a spokesman for the expedition, told reporters at the flight command near Chicago that the 36-year-old architectural engineer was "safe and in good condition."

Earlier, expedition officials said Uliassi made a controlled descent, but because the balloon's communication system was not working, they had few details about why the balloonist decided to abort the flight.

The balloon, named the J. Renee after Uliassi's wife, carries global positioning and other satellite monitoring equipment, and was tracked as it drifted over Myanmar and descended.

Little said a U.S. Embassy official telephoned the command center to report that Uliassi had scrapes and bruises – but no broken bones – and after having some X-rays was spending the night in a hospital. He added that Uliassi telephoned his parents' home and left a voicemail message for his wife saying that he had some bruises but that "everything is A-OK." He said he planned to get some sleep and had found some balloonists to help him pack up his balloon.

It was the second around-the-world solo attempt for Uliassi, whose balloon ruptured over O'Hare International Airport in December 1997 and was forced down in Indiana.

Uliassi had traveled 13,225 miles – more than half the distance around the globe at the equator – before landing at about 2:30 a.m. PST in a field near some railroad tracks about 300 miles north of Yangon.

His distance fell about 1,000 miles short of the world solo balloon flight record set in 1998 by Chicago millionaire Steve Fossett, whose journey ended when a storm off Australia sent his balloon into the Pacific Ocean.

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